

The Christian News-Letter

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Edited by
J. H. OLDHAM

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DEAR MEMBER,

As the invading armies penetrate deeper and deeper into Germany the question of the foundations of the peace becomes daily more urgent.

In an earlier News-Letter (C.N.-L. No. 220) it was maintained that the ends to which Christians must devote every ounce of their energy in the political sphere are the prevention of war and the task of redemption.

The two objectives of security and recovery are essential to one another and of equal importance.¹ Without security there can be no possibility of recovery. Without the provision of adequate standards of living, social unrest both in Germany and in other countries will reach uncontrollable dimensions and become a fertile breeding-ground of war.

No one can yet say what conditions will prevail in Germany, and in Europe generally, when the war comes to an end. Present guesses may prove to be wrong. To envisage clearly certain alternative possibilities may help us to understand better what happens in the coming months.

THE POSSIBILITY OF CHAOS

The first possibility is that of complete chaos. This is vividly presented in a small book, entitled *Germany, Russia and the Future*,² by Dr. J. T. MacCurdy, one of our leading psychologists. The stage seems to him to be set for an exhaustion of the Reich far greater than in 1918. The more elaborate an organization is, the more imagination is required to keep it elastic. When a breakdown comes, it is likely to be cumulative. If the collapse occurs before the allied armies are in a position to take over and supervise the country's economy, the chaos may be appalling. Millions of foreigners will be roaming the country, trying to make their way home and living by larceny and brigandage. The higher officials will be fleeing from the vengeance of the United Nations and of their compatriots. The limited and shrinking supplies of food, which by careful distribution might be made to cover immediate needs, will be concentrated in the hands of looters and black market operators, and famine is

¹ As was forcibly pointed out in a front-page article in *The Times* of January 29, 1945.

² Cambridge University Press, 3s. 6d.

likely to result. The sanitary services will almost inevitably break down and pestilence assume unprecedented proportions.

"If this prognosis is at all justified," Dr. MacCurdy concludes, "discussions as to how Germany is to be restrained from fomenting another war are academic in the extreme. The problem will not be the prevention of German military resurgence, but rather the reorganization of a central Europe from which Germany has disappeared. An area in the middle of Europe peopled by isolated peasants and roaming bands of brigands would become an expert centre for pestilence, both actual and moral, endangering not merely the continent but the whole world."

THE POSSIBILITY OF MORAL REVOLUTION

A second possibility is suggested in an article in *The Nineteenth Century* for January by the editor, Mr. F. A. Voigt. No one who has followed his writings before and during the war will suspect him of underestimating the dimensions of the German evil or the German danger.

Mr. Voigt attaches high significance to the conspiracy last summer in which an attempt was made on Hitler's life. It represented, in his view, in part at least, a moral revolution within Germany against the excesses of Nazi policy and practice. The moral crisis in Germany, out of which Hitler forced his way to power, was but part of the general European crisis. It must be reckoned among the possibilities of the future that the Germans, who were the first to be engulfed, will be the first to re-emerge.

Mr. Voigt believes that many of the conspirators in the recent plot were moved by the conviction that Europe, as well as Germany, is being destroyed by the war. If they had succeeded, they would have destroyed the S.S., the S.A. and the Gestapo. They would have established a despotism, but it would have been a civilized despotism, allowing a certain measure of political liberty and complete religious freedom, and put an end to racial discrimination. They were well aware that Germany had lost the war, that it would inevitably be disarmed, subjected for years to alien control and reduced to the status of a minor power. But they would have insisted on one general condition—that Germany should continue to exist as an organic (though perhaps reduced and decentralized) whole, and become in due course an organic part of a European order. They would have been advocates of not only a German, but a European peace.

We have evidence from reliable neutral sources which confirms Mr. Voigt's assertion that among the conspirators there were men of the highest personal integrity. What must for the present remain uncertain is how large a part was played by these upholders of the European tradition. The view is also held in this country that the most energetic and efficient of the conspirators looked towards Russia rather than the West.

THE BLIGHT OF NIHILISM

Thirdly, there will be a legacy of the war which, unhappily, is not so much a possibility as a certainty. Whatever renewal of spiritual life may come about, the tares which Nazism has sown will continue to propagate themselves and bear their evil fruit. The deliberate rejection of the Christian estimate of man and the exaltation of force as the ultimate principle of social life are spiritual evils, and for this reason they cannot be conquered by the sword or suppressed by coercive measures, and they may take root and flourish in other than German soil.

A fresh picture of the evil which has swollen to frightful dimensions in the Germany of our time has been given us in a recently published volume¹ that contains what is perhaps the most comprehensive, penetrating and well-balanced account of Hitler and the rise of Nazism that has yet appeared.

The first thing that arrests attention is the international sources from which the Nazi dream of world domination was fed. It can be traced back to a pamphlet published eighty years ago by a French lawyer, Maurice Joly, and intended as a satire on Napoleon III, democrat and tyrant, applauded by the masses whom he had unscrupulously exploited. The title of the pamphlet was *A Dialogue in Hell between Machiavelli and Montesquieu, or the Politics of Machiavelli in the Nineteenth Century*. After thirty years of oblivion a copy came into the hands of the secret police in Czarist Russia, who reproduced the ideas in the infamous forgery *The Protocols of the Wise Men of Zion*. In 1917 a copy of this publication was brought by a mysterious stranger to the room of a young student in Moscow. He read there how easy is world domination, since the majority of men are dull and easily satisfied, so that they are as wax in the hands of the clever who are prepared to stick at nothing. A vision rose before him of a world, which has become a unit, brought under the leadership of a single mind, capable with the help of brilliant thinkers of satisfying, and so of controlling, the whole of mankind by all the means which are at the disposal of those who know. The name of the student was Alfred Rosenberg.

The Frenchman, Count Arthur de Gobineau, and the Englishman, Houston Stewart Chamberlain, who in later life acquired German nationality, were the apostles of the doctrine that the clue to history is the emergence, or deliberate creation, of a master race, exercising the leadership of the world. The key to the future, they maintained, is the breeding of such a race and the ruthless elimination of the unfit.

These heady doctrines blended with powerful native tendencies of German thought which exalted the State as the highest revelation of the world spirit and regarded historic greatness as a sufficient

Konrad Heiden, *Der Führer: Hitler's Rise to Power*. p. 614. Victor Gollancz, 10s. 6d.

end in itself. The foundations of Nazi propaganda were already laid in pre-existing ideas of pan-Germanism; Hitler had only to adapt them to the mentality of the masses.

But this conjunction of ideas might not have produced such violent eruptions if social causes had not contributed to the explosion. The Nazi movement had its origin among "a broken people, a broken army, broken men"; it arose out of wreckage. "Ideals had to fall into the mire, destinies to be shattered, characters to sicken, before something new could be born. For this thing was new, and from the very beginning it was frightful."

The movement drew together a definite type of men. They were the uprooted and disinherited, and in the emptiness and anxiety of their existence they were representative of multitudes. "The sentiment," says Dr. Heiden, "that our modern society had arrived at a breaking point, that millions and millions would be crushed in the impending collapse, tormented every man's soul. With unerring sureness Hitler expressed the speechless panic of the masses faced by an invisible enemy and gave the nameless spectre a name."

Anti-Christ "did not arise suddenly out of the distant desert to lay waste our civilization. With fateful necessity he arose everywhere out of the substance and conditions of our own life." It is his universality that makes him dangerous. The anti-Christ, Dr. Heiden says in a pregnant sentence, "is a *world-citizen*, else he could not be a *world-ruler*."

Cynical, despairing, contemptuous of human nature and reckless, the group of men who gathered round Hitler cast from them the bonds of morality and surrendered themselves to an adventure inspired by a blind belief in force. And precisely here lay the attraction of their propaganda. A disillusioned population sensed amid all the injustices and horrors a will to action. Here at least was force, and force was an indubitable reality. Even from those who disapproved of Hitler the reality of accomplished deeds called forth a reluctant admiration. The masses approved the power, even when it made mistakes and did injustice, for it was through lack of power that conditions had grown so bad.

Having chosen anti-Christ the Nazis gave to him an undivided allegiance. They set themselves to break the will of all opponents by deliberate and loathsome cruelty. They brought back torture into Europe and practised it on an unprecedented scale and with refinements in the infliction of pain made possible by modern science. The end, Hitler openly declared, justifies any means.

Dr. Heiden brings out very forcibly that the creators of the Nazi movement were essentially small men, profoundly conscious of their own inadequacy and emptiness. This was particularly true

of Hitler. His life principle might be called "flight into greatness." His decisive realization was that greatness was the way out of the difficulties, defeat and insignificance of his private life; to be a great man makes it easier to be a small individual. His longing found an immediate echo in the German people, oppressed after their defeat by the sense of their own nullity. The explanation of Hitler's astonishing achievements is that he spoke to the soul of the modern man, "who in his pettiness, loneliness and lack of faith longs for community, conviction and greatness."

But, as events have demonstrated, the "flight into greatness" was an escape into an unreal world of fantasy, and the realities which Hitler ignored have asserted their power and involved him in irretrievable ruin.

In a brief postscript Dr. Heiden states the central core of meaning in his story in words that we shall do well to ponder.

"Hitler was able to enslave his own people because he seemed to give them something that even the traditional religions could no longer provide; the belief in a meaning to existence beyond the narrowest self-interest. The real degradation began when people realized that they were in league with the devil, but felt that even the devil was preferable to the emptiness of an existence which lacked a larger significance. The problem to-day is to give that larger significance and dignity to a life that has been dwarfed by the world of material things. Until that problem is solved, the annihilation of Nazism will be no more than the removal of one symptom of the world's unrest."

Considerable space has been given to Dr. Heiden's volume, both because the book is important in itself and because the story which he unfolds leaves us in no doubt whatever that the real enemy is a hideous lie in the soul which must destroy every hope of civilization.

The conditions which provided a breeding ground for Nazism after the last war are likely to be present after this one in an aggravated form. The numbers of the uprooted and disinherited will be still greater. Millions, not only in Germany but in the rest of Europe, have lost faith in everything but violence.

Modern techniques have made the possession of power a glittering prize for the adventurous who have the daring to seize it. Once embarked on the pursuit of power, to hesitate is to be lost. A relentless logic requires that all scruples be set aside. The ruthless, scientific, power State is the supreme menace of our time. To the Nazi conception of the scientific power State the United Nations are opposing the idea of the scientific welfare State. That is the direction in which we have to move. But it is vital to remember how easily the two coalesce, when welfare is understood in a narrow, materialistic sense. The spell of the power State over a certain type

of mind is vividly portrayed in the following passage from Arthur Koestler's remarkable novel, *Arrival and Departure*.¹

"What we really believe," says one of the characters, "is that with the rapid development of science and technique, mankind has entered the phase of its puberty, a phase of radical, global experiments with total disregard of the individual, his so-called rights and privileges, and other liberal mumbo-jumbo. The laws of orthodox economy, customs, currency, frontiers, parliaments, churches, vested sacraments and institutions, marriage, ten commandments—all mumbo-jumbo. We start from scratch. I'll tell you how . . .

"Close your eyes. Imagine Europe up to the Urals as an empty space on the map. There are only fields of energy; hydro-power, magnetic ores, coal-seams under the earth, oil-wells, forests, vineyards, fertile and barren lands. Connect these sources of energy with blue, red, yellow lines and you get the distributive network. Draw circles of varying radius around the points of intersection and you get the centres of industrial agglomeration; work out the human labour required to feed the net at any given point and you get the adequate density of population for any district, province and nation; divide this figure by the quantity of horse-power it produces and you get the standard of living allotted to it. Wipe out those ridiculous winding boundaries, the Chinese walls which cut across our fields of energy; scrap or transfer industries which were heedlessly built in the wrong places; liquidate the surplus population in areas where they are not required; shift the population of certain districts, if necessary of entire nations, to the spaces where they are wanted and to the type of production for which they are racially best fitted; wipe out any disturbing lines of force which might superimpose themselves on your net, that is, the influence of the churches, of overseas capital, of any philosophy, religion, ethical, or aesthetical system of the past."

CLUES TO THE FUTURE

All the conditions we have envisaged will be present in some degree in post-war Europe. What we cannot foresee is the proportions in which they will be combined.

With what attitude and faith shall we confront the world that has been portrayed?

Dark as is the prospect, this is no time for despondency. The experience through which we are passing ought to confirm and strengthen our faith.

The end to which the self-regarding desire for mastery, which has been the dominant force in modern society, inevitably leads is now patent to all. The futility of seeking escape from the emptiness of life in a more reckless abandonment to the concentration of

¹ Jonathan Cape, 7s. 6d.

energy on the pursuit of wealth and power, which has been the chief cause of the apparent meaninglessness of modern existence, has been demonstrated. The moment may be propitious for a fundamental change of outlook.

That nothing will serve us to-day, except a reorientation of our whole life, a change in attitude and conscious direction, a far-reaching inner renewal, is the theme of the new volume by Lewis Mumford, which is a comprehensive study of the development of western man.¹ It confirms at many points the analysis of the contemporary situation which underlay Archbishop Temple's Supplement (C.N.L. No. 198). We ought to draw far more encouragement than we ordinarily do from the fact that in the most diverse quarters men are beginning to see with increasing clearness where modern society in recent centuries has gone wrong, since this knowledge points to the path we must follow if we are to be restored to the wholeness of life.

A similar note is struck in Koestler's arresting novel. Its hero reflects, in a final summing up of his experiences, that since the Renaissance our scientific reasoning has attained greater perfection than our intuitive and ethical beliefs. For four centuries the former has advanced and the latter have decayed. But prior to that the scales moved the opposite way. He is convinced that the process will soon be reversed again. The age of experiments may last another few decades and produce another series of explosions. But the age of quantitative measurements is drawing to a close. He is confident that a new god is about to be born.

The change from decay and disintegration to a renewal of life and hope will certainly not come about automatically. The situation confronts us with a tremendous challenge, and all depends on our response. The future is in the hands of those who dare.

It is surprising how little alive we are to the fact that the faith that can inspire bold and vigorous action is already given. We do not need to search for a faith for our times; we have only to submit ourselves to the power of the faith which, as Christians, is already ours. We know that man is not, as recent centuries have too readily believed, a self-subsisting individual, seeking infinite expansion and dominion of his individual self or of that self magnified and glorified through identification with a group. We believe that what constitutes him man is that he is a responsible person, and that this quality of responsibility is rooted in his capacity to know and obey the will of God. We believe that he can find the fulfilment and satisfaction of his life only in community with his fellows. Our task is to transform social and political life in conformity with these revolutionary conceptions. Since they express the truth of what

¹ *The Condition of Man*. Secker and Warburg, 25s.

man is, we know that, however formidable the task may appear, we are allied with forces that must in the end be victorious.

When we have identified the real enemy, it becomes plain that there is no reason why we should not expect to find allies in the fight against him in Germany itself.

Our attitude towards the Germans will differ widely from *both* of two prevalent and opposing attitudes. The one embraces all Germans in a common condemnation. The other, as expressed in a recent speech by the Bishop of Birmingham, is inspired by the belief that friendliness, generosity and trust are in the *political* sphere a practicable alternative to coercive measures.

The second view ignores the fact that gangsters are not necessarily responsive to this kind of treatment, and that the gangster temper may become a widespread habit of mind that can be eradicated only by the slow processes of education.

The first view is completely at variance with the plain facts of human nature, in which good and evil are inextricably interwoven. The former may persist where the latter appears wholly triumphant, and the almost complete dominance of evil may be followed by a resurgence of the good. We have no right to exclude from the possibilities of the future a powerful reaction in Germany itself against the whole Nazi scheme of life. There is nothing in human experience to rule out the possibility that from the people who succumbed most readily and vehemently to deadly error may come the most powerful revolt against it. Christ enunciated a principle which has applications in every sphere of life, when he declared that the first may be last and the last first.

If we are realists, we must do equal justice to two different sets of facts. It is true that the spirit of anti-Christ has for the time being become incarnated in the German nation. The bestial crimes that have been committed must meet with punishment, and the guilty nation must be deprived of the power to do further harm. But it is also true that the spirit of anti-Christ is not confined to Germany. It has a lodgement in the hearts of all of us. We have to fight it in ourselves, in our own nation and in the world as a whole. In this life-and-death world struggle against anti-Christ we shall fail in our clear Christian duty if we are not on the alert to discover, welcome and co-operate with every tendency in Germany which shows signs of the redemptive working of the Spirit of Christ.

Yours sincerely,

D. H. Deacon

THE PARISH MEETING

By the Rev. ALAN ECCLESTONE, Vicar of Darnall, Sheffield

It is generally admitted that the pattern and relationships of the society we have grown up in no longer suffice. The disintegrating processes of past centuries have undermined the structure of social life to a perilous extent, chiefly indeed in the weakening of that sense of local attachment and local responsibility such as the ancient parish system fostered and expressed. The name of the parish survives, the substance has largely disappeared. The responsibilities once shouldered by the parish, discussed at its meetings and carried out by its officials, are now largely unrecognized. A town parish has little meaning, being quite often an arbitrary collection of streets.

In the process we have lost something vital and necessary in social and spiritual life. A sense of neighbourhood and neighbourliness is necessary to our spiritual and moral growth. The parish is important, and we must face the task of recovering its life and meaning, not simply to restore a piece of social machinery but to work out afresh in terms of present-day human needs one part of that Gospel committed to our charge. To save men in a world which is disintegrating the Church must confront the man in the street with the spectacle of the common life of a closely-knit body. It must "be the Church" to men in terms of their need. We shall not get men and women assembled again with a full, strong, vigorous sense of common life until by example and precept we have made manifest its truth. The "parish meeting," as it is now being developed in several parishes, is an attempt to find an answer to this problem. What is actually happening is described below, though details and experience vary according to the kind of parish and the time in which it has been at work.

The parish meeting is the focus of all that is planned and done in the life of the parish. It is the assembly of the Church in that locality to realize its true nature and to grow in deeper understanding of its calling. The report of the Malvern Conference proposed that, "where possible, the whole congregation habitually worshipping together should regularly meet to plan and carry out some common enterprise, however simple, for the upbuilding of its community life and for the general good." There were some such meetings in existence at the time, but one may wonder how far these words were taken seriously and how much effort was made to call together the congregation in this way.

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE CONGREGATION

The first thing that needs emphasis is this fact of assembling the congregation. Daniel Jenkins has done much to point out the

significance of this.¹ Writing as a Congregationalist, he says that "in a properly ordered Congregational Church admission to the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper carries with it admission to the responsibility of membership of the Church meeting. He has laid hold on his true manhood by embracing Jesus Christ in faith under the veils of the bread and wine, and in so doing has found true community with his fellows. He is ready for living then as a responsible person in the family of Christ's people, and the Church meeting gathered together at the hearth of the household of the Faith, after the 'family' has been fed at the Lord's Table, is the means through which he can do so."

Quite rightly he goes on to inquire whether the parish Eucharist, as it has widely developed in the Church of England, does not need something like the Church meeting to follow. Some of us would answer that we do regard the parish meeting as an essential expression of the family life realized in the fullness of truth in the parish Communion. Our task at the parish meeting is to see how the Church is "to actualize in her life what is sacramentally given in the parish Communion." We, therefore, expect that those who normally worship together will look upon the parish meeting as the extending of the new life into the realm of social relationships and deliberate planned activities. Before we ever come to put out organizations for Youth, for social or educational purposes, there should be knowledge and experience of living and sharing in the common life of the Body. Men and women must recover the sense of belonging to this Body by the very practical method of assembling week by week together to realize what this common life implies.

On some weeknight, then, we call together the congregation. There are, of course, a number of Church-going people who do not see the necessity for this. They do not visualize the life of the Church as the life of a closely-knit body of people, knowing each other and learning together to bear the common burden. Until they do see it and come in, we can only go on trying to explain still more clearly what we mean. Membership is as wide as the whole body of baptized people; nor shall we turn away the unbaptized, for it is here in the fellowship of this meeting that we believe that the outsider may catch a glimpse of what the Christian life looks like and begin to make his way towards it.

What then does the parish meeting do? First of all, as people come in in twos and threes, there is the chance, nay, the obligation, to get to know each other. It is still true of our ordinary congregations worshipping in Church that they are content to remain acquaintances by sight and do not realize that they are very members of his Body by acknowledging this to each other. There is no need to enlarge on this now, but it has behind it a sad and well-nigh tragic

¹ See both *The Nature of Catholicity* and *The Church Meeting and Democratic Life*.

story of indifference and blindness to the elementary perceptions of Christian charity. We have tried always to meet in the vicarage rather than in any parish hall, because, in this matter of genuine family life being a standard of Church life, there is so much leeway to be caught up, that at all costs we must emphasize the "home" to which all the children of the "family" are coming.

And now begins the discussion. For the most part we avoid having speeches. We are concerned first of all with the expression by all our people of what they see of life as Church members. All those matters which affect our lives are subjects to be discussed and all should have freedom to raise a question. The subjects will range from those which are directly parochial to those widest issues which life in the world inevitably raises.

It needs emphasizing that this discussion is the place where "the mind of the Church" is shaped and apprehended by its members. What is talked of here is to be acted upon by the body of the Church, so that there can never be any impression given that our discussions lead nowhere. On the other hand, it is found necessary to come back to many problems again and again, because we see no solution and no mode of attack has opened up.

Equally important is the opening given for the grievances and the misunderstandings which arise in the life of any family. We know as a matter of experience that the common life has been immensely strengthened by the fact that we have had our difficulties talked out together before the Church, and that we can begin to understand in practice what the friendly smiting of the righteous is like. If only people will hold on, if only they will grasp this family tie in both hands and be there as usual, the discord can be overcome and the unity laid hold of.

It is here too that the difficult question of the relation of the parish priest to his people is faced. That he should be "of" the family and "in" the family rather than "over" it, that he should be known as a learner as well as a teacher, is made possible through this meeting. There is no comparison between this relationship so set up and that of being chairman of a Parochial Church Council. They belong to utterly different conceptions of the way in which the work of the Church is to be done. There is similarly a vast difference between the ordinary idea of "business" and that understanding of the leaven at work which grows in the life and practice of the parish meeting. That decisions are taken and proposals acted on is probably less important in the long run than the fact that we have grown together in a realization of the nature of the Church. Young and old, newcomers and veterans, men and women, are on the footing of equality and joined together in a visible community.

We have found in practice the great gain of making contact with other Churches working along these lines. We can remember what a help it was for a large town Church to invite a number of us from a mining village on the other side of the county to join in a week-end of worship and conference. Now almost every week some visitor from another congregation is present, or one of our number has gone to join in the parish meeting elsewhere, and through that interchange there grows steadily the fuller sense of the whole Church at work. When Dr. Nicolas Zernov talked with us of the life of the Orthodox Church we felt that so much of what he said was something already known in practice. He talked "our language." When one of the German Confessional pastors came to be with us and spoke of his experience in a Church re-discovering its life, we knew that what he said fitted on to the things with which we were now familiar.

It is clear from this that the parish meeting is more than study-group, more than "organization," more than "social," but does include and vitalize all these things. The parent body of all specific organizations, it needs to be recognized as such.

Like the parish Communion, it can be treated as a novelty, the use of which may solve some of our long-standing difficulties and so be introduced without a real grasp of what it implies. Then, when the difficulties arise, when numbers drop off, when people will not talk, the temptation to drop it because "it doesn't work" comes in and frequently succeeds. The point to be borne in mind is surely that we do this, believing that we are recovering an essential part of the Christian Church; that part of our inheritance, the *koinonia*, which now stares at us so vividly in the pages of the New Testament. Thereafter there can be no turning back. We know that for months we go through "sticky patches," that people whom we thought had seen the truth of it come no more and even deride it, that all of us lose our way from time to time. But we should no more dream of dropping it than we should cancel the parish Communion. We have gone on long enough to know the enlightening of our eyes which comes in a quite unlooked for way when some newcomer or some new problem suddenly becomes the channel of a new accession of the Spirit. Growing and dying, and again reborn, the parish meeting, as I have seen it in a variety of parishes, is the quickening of our congregations to meet the tasks of the day. "They that feared the Lord, spake often one to another, and the Lord heard it."

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